

Program Notes

Ionisation – Edgard Varèse

Ionisation is built on a most sensitive handling and contrast of different kinds of percussive sounds. There are those indefinite in pitch, like the bass drum, snare drum, wood blocks, and cymbals; those of relatively definite musical pitch, such as the piano and chimes; those of continually moving pitch, like the sirens and 'lion's roar.' It is an example of 'spatial construction,' building up to a great complexity of interlocking 'planes' of rhythm and timbre, and then relaxing the tension with the slowing of rhythm, the entrance of the chimes, and the enlargement of the 'silences' between sounds. There are suggestions of the characteristic sounds of modern city life.

—Sidney Finkelstein

Haikoustics – Enrique Guimerá

Haikoustics is 15 short pieces based on short, ancient Japanese poems called haikus. This poetic form, with a very simple and direct structure and defined metric – 17 syllables divided into three lines of 5-7-5 – tries to represent what is happening in an instant, like a flash. Haiku do not describe an idea or an object, they only suggest it. This work, written for five marimbas whose placement is essential to achieve both visual and auditory effects, tries to reflect that poetic essence but in music: they are like "sound haikus". The poems on which it is inspired belong both to classical oriental masters (Basho, Issa, Moritake, etc.), and to other contemporary authors, in this case from the Canary Islands (Sabas Martín, Manuel Chinaea).

The 15 pieces are presented in five groups of three haikus each, with both a literary (natural phenomena, plants, animals, etc.) and a musical connection. The three haikus of each group are actually variations of the same theme, which are presented without development, like small minimalist morsels. Among these miniatures, there are some of the modal and/or atonal type and in their execution not only the mallets are used in their usual way, but also the bare hands, the mallets turned upside down to achieve "wooden" effects, etc.

—Enrique Guimerá

Bicksa – Thom Hasenpflug

Bicksa (or Bicska) is a Hungarian word which translates as a type of small, sharp knife. The scoring and style are also intended to be sharp, aggressive, and articulate. I wrote this piece during a period of extreme bitterness in my life. Rather than hurling this anger at the world, I did what all artists do and channeled it into my work. Then, I hurled that at the world.

—Thom Hasenpflug

Estudios de Frontera – Alejandro Viñao

Estudios de Frontera: Homage to Nancarrow is concerned with the perceptual illusion of multiple simultaneous speeds or tempi. Nancarrow's music developed in actuality multiple speeds. This was not an illusion. Yet, the irrational rhythms necessary to create his music cannot be played accurately by human performers. Mechanical pianos or computers are required for their precise reproduction. This movement explores the type of rhythms that create the illusion that multiple independent tempi are being heard while remaining playable by musicians. These polyrhythms are playable because they contain a common pulse that binds them together. The illusion of multiple speeds works when the composer and the performer manage to conceal this common pulse exposing only that which makes these rhythms 'feel' completely independent. In the resulting music the five percussion players share one time while creating the illusion that each instrumental part is running free at its own independent time. The type of polyrhythms I worked with were used already by Chopin in his Fourth Ballade and more recently by Ligeti in his 6th piano etude. However, I wanted to 'stretch' their possibilities to the very limit. I wanted to explore not only the appearance of having two or more musical lines running at different speeds but also the illusion that these lines were accelerating or decelerating with regards to each other.

—Alejandro Viñao

Djilile – Peter Sculthorpe

Djilile is one of a number of landscape-inspired works which I have based on an adaptation, with additional material, of the indigenous Australian chant 'djilile', meaning 'whistling duck on a billabong'. The chant, in its original form, was collected by Professor A.P. Elkin and Trevor Jones during a field trip to Arnhem Land in the late 1950's. While it is still sung today, I have found that aborigines in the area do not seem to recognize it in any kind of instrumental form. To them, it appears to exist only when it is sung, a quite wondrous concept.

—Peter Sculthorpe

Third Construction – John Cage

Third Construction utilizes a wide array of instruments, including tin cans, split pieces of bamboo, a conch shell and the "lion's roar," a modified drum that uses friction to create an animal-like groaning sound. Despite very complex rhythms that often displace the listener's perception of the beat, the piece is in entirely in cut time, and follows its own numerical form, a more complex version of the 'square root' formula used in his First and Second Constructions. In this case, there are 24 sections of 24 measures each. In Third Construction, Cage created a great sense of fluidity and unpredictability with an extra twist in his numerical structure: the players' phrases constantly seem to overlap and interrupt each other, because each musician's phrases are grouped according to a different scheme within the 24 measure sections (for instance, the first player's phrases are always 2-8-2-4-5-3, while the fourth player's phrases are 8-2-4-5-3-2).

—Third Coast Percussion

Biographies

William Moersch

William Moersch is internationally renowned as a marimba virtuoso, chamber and symphonic percussionist, recording artist, and educator. He has appeared as soloist with symphonic orchestras and in recital throughout North and South America, Europe, the Far East, and Australia. A regularly featured artist at international percussion festivals, he has performed on more than seventy-five recordings and is perhaps best known for commissioning much of the prominent modern repertoire for marimba, from composers including Irwin Bazelon, Richard Rodney Bennett, Martin Bresnick, Jacob Druckman, Eric Ewazen, David Lang, Paul Lansky, Libby Larsen, Steven Mackey, Akemi Naito, Roger Reynolds, Gunther Schuller, Joseph Schwantner, John Serry, Andrew Thomas, Alejandro Viñao, James Wood, and Charles Wuorinen. In addition, he was the first marimbist ever to receive a National Endowment for the Arts Solo Recitalist Fellowship and has also been honored by N.E.A. Recording and Consortium Commissioning grants. In 2020, the Percussive Arts Society recognized William Moersch's contributions with their Lifetime Achievement in Education Award.

Prior to his appointment at the University of Illinois in 1998, Mr. Moersch was a free-lance musician in New York City for over two decades. He performed with the American Symphony, Metropolitan Opera, New Jersey Symphony, New York Chamber Symphony, New York City Opera, Orchestre de la Suisse Romande, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, as a featured soloist in the New York Shakespeare Festival's Broadway production of *The Pirates of Penzance*, and on numerous motion picture soundtracks. Mr. Moersch also created graduate degree programs in marimba performance at the Peabody Conservatory and Rutgers University and has presented master classes throughout the world. Currently, he is Principal Timpanist of Sinfonia da Camera and the Champaign-Urbana Symphony Orchestra, Artistic Director of New Music Marimba, on the Percussive Arts Society's Board of Advisors, and an Artist Endorser for Pearl Drums / Adams Percussion, SABIAN cymbals, Grover Pro Percussion, and Innovative Percussion mallets.

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Please join us for the University of Illinois Steel Band, Ricardo Flores, director, tomorrow, Wednesday, April 13, 2022, at 7:30 p.m. in this theater.

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Teofilo "Tito" Carrillo
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Voice

Ollie Watts Davis
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Ricardo Herrera
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Woodwinds, Brass and Percussion

Elliot Chasanov
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Ricardo Flores
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